IN THE CLAIMS

1. (currently amended) A method for replacing a portion of a gas turbine engine rotor blade, the rotor blade having an original blade contour defined by a blade first sidewall and a blade second sidewall, said method comprising:

cutting through the rotor blade such that a cut line extends from a leading edge of the blade to a trailing edge of the blade and between the first sidewall and the second sidewall, and such that the cut line extends at least partially through a hollow portion of the blade defined between the first and second sidewalls;

removing the portion of the rotor blade that is radially outward of the cut line; and

coupling a replacement blade portion to remaining blade portion such that a newly formed rotor blade is formed with a predetermined aerodynamic contour that is one of an improvement in an aerodynamic performance over the original blade contour and substantially mirroring the original blade contour.

2. (original) A method in accordance with Claim 1 wherein coupling a replacement blade portion further comprises welding the replacement blade portion to the remaining blade.

3. (original) A method in accordance with Claim 2 further comprising machining the weld such that the newly formed rotor blade has a contour that substantially mirrors that of the original blade contour.

4. (original) A method in accordance with Claim 2 further comprising automatically welding the replacement blade portion to the remaining blade portion.

5. (original) A method in accordance with Claim 1 wherein coupling a replacement blade portion further comprises coupling a replacement blade portion to the remaining blade portion that is fabricated from a material that is the same material used in fabricating the original rotor blade.